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Behind the Scenes at the Silver Studio: Rex Silver and the Hidden Mechanisms of Interwar Textile Design

The Silver Studio produced designs for mass-market wallpapers and textiles between 1880 and around 1960. This paper draws on evidence from the Silver Studio Collection (now at the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, Middlesex University), to propose that Silver Studio designs in the interwar period were never the work of one individual but were rather the product of complex negotiations between clients and designers, mediated by Rex Silver. The Studio's diaries and other records provide an insight into these negotiations and raise questions about the nature of 'authorship' in design.

Keywords: Silver Studio; textile design; authorship; attribution; historicism

To what extent should historians pay attention to designers and architects as individual historical subjects? Nikolaus Pevsner's *Pioneers of Modern Design*, first published in 1936 arguably established a tradition of design history narratives based on male, modernist, individual hero-designers.¹ Subsequent design historians sought to distance themselves from what Whitehouse described as "the privileging of the innovative designers, aesthetic form, and zeitgeist" which placed emphasis on the aesthetic quality of particular kinds of objects and buildings.² In particular, feminist design historians such as Cheryl Buckley and others challenged the notion of the canon, partly by the re-evaluation of previously overlooked female designers and architects, and partly by questioning the ways in which patriarchal structures operated to constrain women's opportunities and choices in the first place.³ Central to all of these debates is the question of the importance we should attach to the individual designer, and whether the history of design and of architecture can best be explained through a biographical approach to the lives of designers.

More recently a recognition of the dispersed nature of design or architectural production has brought attention to the multiplicity of people who had a part to play in the production of buildings, objects, patterns, magazines, images and so on. Jeremy Till, for example, has argued, that 'architecture depends' on numerous players in addition to the star architect. Taking this approach, Till suggests, enables us to understand buildings as evolving and contingent, and as having a life after the moment that the architect signs off the final blueprint.⁴ Similarly, Traganou rejects traditional 'Pevsnerian' approaches to architectural history based on biographical narratives of great men. Such approaches, she contends, have a tendency to locate a building's meaning solely within the context of that individual's other work, and as such the effect is to "... valorize paradigmatic architectural cases that are perceived as pioneering for the prescriptive value that they carry for subsequent architectural productions".⁵ By focussing only on the new and the pioneering, such approaches overlook everything beyond the "the elite paradigms or architecture's significance for the non-professional, wider audiences..."⁶ There is a need, by this argument, for a wider perspective that encompasses non-elite production and recognises the many players who have a part to

play in a building's history (from local government officials and planners to occupants), rather than looking only at the architect's original intention.

Recent developments in architectural and design history have done much to move us away from histories that prioritize the work of individual (usually male) hero designers. Yet when faced with an actual example of creative work, such as a printed textile, one of the first questions that springs to mind is "who designed it?" (Figure 1). The answer, we imagine, will help us to locate the object both temporally and geographically, and also to locate it within a more intangible hierarchy of cultural value: is this object important or unimportant, known or unknown, named or anonymous? Lou Taylor suggests that textiles can be categorised by means of a hierarchy based partly on the material itself, and partly on other marks of 'distinction'.⁷ On this basis, silk is of higher status than cotton; fabrics produced by unusual or costly manufacturing techniques are of higher status than machine printed; and textiles associated with known designers are of higher status than anonymous ones. In the context of discussion of twentieth century pattern design, we might add that 'modernist' textiles are of higher status than those featuring 'historicist' patterns.

Taking a lead from Traganou, this article explores the idea that to focus on a biographical approach to design history leads us to place too great an emphasis on the most forward-looking cultural products, and hence to overlook the histories of the designed objects that formed the material world of the majority of non-elite consumers. Using the example of the Silver Studio, this article looks at why design attribution is problematic both in the sense of the evidence available, and because of its implications for our understanding of design history. To expand design histories to encompass un-named or little-known designers is to decide whether to focus only on the best, most emblematic, iconic and paradigmatic of cultural products, or whether to expand our vision to encompass a wider range of objects. To do so also means acknowledging the histories of a wider range of historical subjects: people for whom the purchase of objects by a 'named designer' was neither an economic option nor an aesthetic choice. The textiles designed by the Silver Studio do not generally fit into the 'design canon': they feature traditional and historicist motifs rather than forward-looking ones, representing 'popular' rather than 'fashionable' taste. Yet as Judy Attfield notes, to speak of the "aesthetics of popular taste" is inherently contradictory, since "strictly speaking, aesthetics by its discriminatory nature does not really embrace middle-of-the-road or popular taste within its remit".⁸

This article offers a close reading of archive material and objects from the Silver Studio Collection (now part of the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture at Middlesex University). It builds on previous work by Protheroe and others on design histories of the textile industry in general and the role of the Silver Studio in particular.⁹ Two separate, yet related, aspects of this question will be considered. Firstly, the Silver Studio kept detailed administrative records throughout its long history, and historians have drawn upon these to outline the Studio's working practices and relationships with employees. Protheroe, for example, used the Studio's daybooks, diaries, timesheets, photograph albums and correspondence files to illuminate the role that women played within the Studio in the interwar period.¹⁰ I want to argue that these administrative

records should be considered in their own right as part of the work of the Studio, rather than read as evidence of the ‘real’ work of the Studio. To do so points towards a more nuanced understanding of commercial design as a collaborative process involving input from numerous individuals. Secondly, I will narrow the focus down to one specific example of the Silver Studio’s administrative records, a Studio diary for 1928. This diary reveals the complex authorship of a specific sample of printed textile that survives within the Silver Studio Collection. I will use these examples to suggest that rather than focussing on individual authorship, the Silver Studio’s output might be better understood as the result of complex (and frequently unspoken) negotiations between designer, manufacturer, and buying public, and be evidence of an alternative history of interwar modernity.

The Silver Studio and the interwar textile industry

The Silver Studio was a commercial design studio based in Hammersmith, west London, from 1880 to 1965. It provides a useful case study because it was commercially successful over a long period, but neither its own name, nor the names of its individual employees were well known to the wider public. Producers of mass-market textiles sourced the majority of their designs for printed fabrics from independent studios or freelancers: the proportion was slightly smaller for woven fabrics due to the greater technical knowledge required to produce a successful weave. Furnishing textiles tended to be replaced frequently within an interior scheme and consequently, as Christine Boydell notes, the industry was a “voracious consumer of designs from a variety of sources”.¹¹ In the 1920s and 30s the Silver Studio was one of a number of companies providing designs to an astonishing number of clients. Records suggest that in 1928, for example, it did business with nearly thirty separate firms, or individuals acting as agents for other firms, which between them produced a range of products including printed and woven textiles, carpets, bedspreads, wallpapers, dress prints and ties (see Appendix). In a sense, the Silver Studio and its competitors were part of a whole ‘hidden mechanism’ of the British textile industry, comprised of a network of small independent firms and freelance designers all carrying out a highly specialized part of the design and production process.

Independent design studios such as the Silver Studio were effectively small cogs in the large machine that was the British textile industry in the interwar period. Little detailed evidence of the Studio’s competitors survives: Hayes Marshall listed twelve other textile design studios in operation in 1939 (Barker Studios; Ivan de Coutère; WE Currie and Co; James Haward; Headon Designs Ltd; Neville Headon; Newbold and Haughton; Sidney M Plaskett; AW Mills Porter; W Fielden Royle; JS Wheelwright; Wroe and Gee).¹² None of these could be considered household names now, nor were they likely to have been well known to the general public at the time, and it is not clear exactly how many people were employed by each. Writing to Rex Silver in 1953, the publisher Frank Lewis reflected on the disappearance, by that point, of a number of independent design studios that until then had seemed to have a secure place in the market:

“...it was only a few years ago when there was, Haward, Silver, Fraser & Gaudioz, Albert Griffiths (sic), the Rigby's, Carey, Doran and any number of others ...”¹³

Lewis's mention of Doran complicates matters further as James Doran is listed in Hayes Marshall's book as an individual designer rather than the head of a studio. However, the existence of so many independent design firms in the 1920s and 30s underlines the huge demand for textile designs for mass production in this period, and - more importantly - for designs that were readily translatable into machine production. The high cost of production, involving the engraving of metal rollers, meant that textile firms had to be certain that a design would repay the investment required to produce it. The decision-making that preceded the production of commercially successful textiles was too important to be left to individual designers: designs were the result of numerous discussions and decisions based on technical, aesthetic and commercial judgements.

The names of many of the people who worked at the Silver Studio are known to us, so they cannot strictly be described as 'anonymous'. On the other hand we know very little else about them, since aside from their work for the Studio they generally left very little trace in the historical record. As historian Alison Light found in relation to her own family history, many of the working people of Britain left "almost no 'ego-documents' as historians now call them – letters, diaries, memoirs – which might give the flavour and attachments of a life".¹⁴ The Studio's employees were no exception, having left very little trace other than their scant mentions in the Silver Studio records, hence knowledge of individuals' names does not provide a way in to understanding authorship in the conventional sense.

Design at the Silver Studio

The Silver Studio was established in 1880 by Arthur Silver. Silver was himself a trained designer, but was clear in his view that designers of wallpapers and textiles should not expect to express their own artistic vision. Rather, he believed their role should be to provide a service to clients. He argued that:

"...whatever his personal taste, a manufacturer cannot afford to go on producing unsaleable goods. The problem we [ie professional designers] must endeavour to solve, is to supply manufacturers with saleable popular designs that, even in the lowest class, do not offend the canons of artistic propriety, and in some cases are (if I may say so) as good as any effort can make them."¹⁵

Arthur Silver understood that his role as head of the Studio was to pay close attention to the requirements of Studio's immediate customers, the manufacturers, and to their ultimate customers, the furnishing-buying public. Manufacturers wanted designs that would satisfy popular tastes and translate economically to industrial production. Arthur Silver possessed a good understanding of the cost implications of each element of designs for various products, noting that, for example "...the more extravagance you permit yourself in the design, the greater the cost of production, therefore if you require a long length for your repeat, you must be assured that the advantage gained is worth the cost".

Arthur's death in 1896 meant that by the early years of the twentieth century the Studio was under the directorship of his eldest son, Rex. Rex Silver was himself a competent designer, but his role within the Studio can be more accurately described as 'designer-manager'. Under his leadership the Studio continued to provide technically competent and

commercially viable patterns to a wide range of clients, including textile and (to a lesser extent), wallpaper manufacturers, producing for the middle and lower end of the market. Throughout the early years of the twentieth century, Rex Silver employed around a dozen designers on both a salaried and freelance basis.¹⁶ The role of his employees was to work to his instruction: they were valued for their skills of draughtsmanship and technical ability, but designers working in this context did not expect the luxury of personal self-expression. Nor did they expect that their own names would be one of the selling points of the textile or wallpaper that was the end product. In fact, the Silver Studio remained rooted in a tradition of design that was based on the work of un-named designers. As Protheroe points out:

"In many respects Rex Silver and his staff of designers represented a twentieth-century evolution of the eighteenth century calico-printer's assistant, a profession defined by the ability to design directly in response to the dictates of the market and an understanding of the technicalities of mechanical reproduction."¹⁷

Thus while the Silver Studio employed people who were called 'designers', the products that resulted from their labour were not 'designer' in the sense (exclusivity, quality, high status) now implied by the word.

To briefly outline the Studio's working practices and the records that were kept: design ideas were initially developed as sketches, often in miniature, as a way of demonstrating an idea to a client (Figure 2). Designs might also be sketched at full size show the working of the repeat (Figure 3). More fully-worked designs frequently featured a chart on the bottom edge to indicate to the client how many colours would be required to print (Figure 4). Sometimes designers visited museums and exhibitions in order to gather inspiration: a letter to Rex from female employee Miss Winifred Mold mentions a visit to the Arts and Crafts exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1928, which she reported showed "not much of interest".¹⁸ Alternatively, new design ideas were generated through a process of discussion with clients and by reference to existing sources. Either way, Rex Silver reviewed design ideas and discussed them with clients, and if the client were interested the design would be 'passed' for further development. Each design was given a 'Studio Number' to uniquely identify it during its various stages of development. Rex's role was to understand each client's requirements and to translate these into instructions to the designer, which were provided by post, verbally or written on the designs themselves. A pencil note scribbled along the bottom edge of one design noted that, "The broad leaves are inclined to be rather clumsy - daintiness and delicacy is the essence of a successful dress pattern. Please complete" (Figure 5). Instructions such as these which attempted to express intangible qualities such as 'lightness of touch', as well as technical specifications such as the size of the pattern repeat, are common throughout the Silver Studio's records.

The final versions of designs were photographed and the resulting images stored sequentially in albums with their associated numbers. As designs were sold they were recorded in 'daybooks', with details of the date, the Studio Number, the client, and the name of the designer. Such record keeping was important in order to ensure that payment was received from the client for work completed, and that payment was made to the Studio's employees for their time. Every change or

reiteration demanded by a client increased the cost of a design; Rex was required to carefully balance the need to satisfy his customers' requirements with an awareness of the cost of this in terms of his employees' labour.

One element of the Studio's administrative records is the series of diaries maintained during the 1920s and 30s which functioned as both a method for managing customer relationships and a record of daily business. The focus here is on one particular volume, from 1928, the earliest to have survived (Figure 6). Further diaries exist throughout the 1930s: analysis of these was not possible within the scope of this article but would doubtless prove a fruitful area for future research. 1928 was a somewhat arbitrary choice based on the existence a typewritten transcript making close reading and analysis easier, and on the fact that it was possible to match a reference within that year's diary to a textile that survives within the Silver Studio Collection, a circumstance that is relatively unusual but useful for this discussion.

Created within a simple mass-produced ruled notebook, the first part of the 1928 diary has been customised with an alphabetized index of names cut into the edges of the page by hand (Figure 7). This alphabetized index records names of individuals and their company affiliations. This first section cross-references to the second part of the book that records the dates on which those individuals visited the Studio, in a running chronological order. The diary thus provides us with a record of the day-to-day business of the Studio and its clients. For the Studio it functioned as a reminder of which clients had seen which designs, what had been agreed, and what actions needed to be taken next. The exact 'author' of these diaries is not clear, but we can surmise that during 1928 the diary was maintained by Miss Cook, Rex Silver's secretary. In a sense authorship is immaterial, since it is not a personal journal but rather an example of one component of the necessary working apparatus of a busy design firm, but Miss Cook seems the likeliest author given her role as Silver's secretary and general assistant.

The 1928 diary contains numerous mentions of designs that were then in progress, referred to by their Studio Number, enabling cross-referencing to the Studio's photographic records, daybooks (equivalent to sales ledgers) and to correspondence with clients. According to this diary, the Silver Studio received visits from over sixty individuals in the first half of the year alone. These were in some cases the owners or representatives of textile firms, but were also buyers working for specific firms or agents buying designs on behalf of a number of companies. Visitors generally came by appointment, but would occasionally call in at short notice if they happened to be in London. For example, on February 7th, 1928:

"Mr Fisk called without warning yesterday morning about 10 o'clock. FC started with him and RS [Rex Silver] continued to show him all we had to date likely to be of interest but did not show him miniatures..."¹⁹

The ability to keep track of which client had seen which design ideas was clearly an important function of the diary, both to avoid wasting time by showing them the same things on subsequent visits, and because of the commercial sensitivity of showing design ideas which might have already been under consideration by a competitor. Where names were underlined it

indicated a cross-reference to the details of that individual or company in the alphabetized section (effectively an early form of hyperlink).

The diary entries appear on one level to be a factual reporting of events, but we can read glimpses of some of the personalities involved, even through the relatively unemotional text. The entry for January 22nd 1928 hints at the lengths to which Rex and his employees had to go to satisfy their clients, and suggests something of the patience and diplomacy required in such situations:

Mr AC King of Titus Blatter, New York called at about ¼ to 2 by appointment. He was staying at the Ritz Hotel. He spent a long time here and RS [Rex Silver] turned out everything likely to be of interest for him to see...He saw the 3 top drawers in the smaller chest and the main top drawer in the large chest which means he saw all the best designs large and small at the moment in the studio. He was not interested in large designs and would not even consider them as ideas...”²⁰

As this example suggests, each visit involved detailed discussion of design ideas between the representative of the client company and Rex Silver. The volume of work and the large number of clients meant that it was vital to maintain accurate notes of ongoing discussions. These diaries seem to have functioned as informal, internal records in addition to the more formal business records of letters and invoices that requested and receipted payments for completed designs. We can assume that Miss Cook attended meetings with clients and made the notes that appear in the diary. She would also have been responsible for ensuring that the Studio followed up on the outcome of these discussions, including that further instructions for the development of designs were relayed to the Studio’s employees or that letters of agreement were sent to clients.

The Silver Studio diary for 1928 is a reminder of the invisible and emotional labour involved in remembering clients’ names, which firm they represented, and the need to make them welcome in the Studio during their visit. (‘Emotional labour’ is not a term that would have been used at the time, but is one that we can perhaps read into the diary retrospectively).²¹ The diary maintains an impersonal tone, but its existence points to the importance of maintaining details of customers, and of ensuring that this knowledge was shared rather than personal. Further, there was a need to record information not just about individual clients in relation to the Silver Studio, but in relation to each other. Visitors often imparted useful snippets of information about changes of personnel within client firms, which were duly noted. One of the Studio’s regular visitors passed on the fact that, “Mr W Dorrell has taken Mr May’s place at Libertys (sic) for Dress Fabrics”.²² Another diary entry records a visit of Mr Muhle of Tullialan Fabric Co, noting “Mr Muhle’s brother is a Rug & Carpet manufacturer under the name of James Muhle &Co, Dysart, Fife and he will give him our name and we may hear from him”.²³ That so many apparently small details are recorded suggests their importance in maintaining good relationships with clients, and thus of their relevance to the ongoing success of the Silver Studio’s business.

It is possible to read the Silver Studio diaries as simply a window on to a world of work. However, the diaries did not simply record the workings of the Studio but in a very real sense the maintenance of the diaries was part of the work of the Studio, and as such they can be seen as one of the hidden mechanisms of design history. The 1928 diary (and the other administrative records to which it cross-refers) represents meticulous effort undertaken by an un-acknowledged, probably female, employee, and suggests the complex negotiations at work in creating a design. Without these records the Studio's work could not have continued; both their existence and their contents point to the difficulty to attributing particular designs to specific people, as will be seen in the next section.

Case study: Textile Design for Denby & Son

One of the Studio's regular visitors was Mr Milnes, a partner in the Bradford based firm of Robert Denby & Son. His visit to the Silver Studio in December 1928 was the third he had made that year, having previously called in February and October. He visited again on December 17, 1928 to discuss ongoing business, including looking at new design ideas and passing others for further development:

“Milnes called and discussed all work in hand. We must send to B/D [ie ‘Bob’ or Robert Denby, head of the firm of Denby and Son] 2 completed designs 6013 & 6034 for consideration. Make new sketch using Iris for Water Line b.g.[ie background] idea & new sketch for small Needle-work 6033. Proceed with Dutch Groups 6035 & Elephants 5527. Saw working of 6012 & may proceed. Ordered 2 new ideas, 6045 Needlework Basket on 24 x 29 ½ for 12 colours inch, & an open floral without birds from sketch 5636 on 24 x 29 ½ for 12 colours inch. Specially interested in Looking Glass Floral of Prices...”²⁴

The above entry is typical of the kind of information recorded in the Silver Studio diaries. It functioned as a ‘to do’ list (“We must send”); as a note of the discussions held (“proceed with Dutch Groups 6035 and Elephants 5527”); and as a record of which designs were seen by the client during his visit to the Studio that day (“Saw working of 6012 and may proceed”). It also served as a record of what the client wanted to see more of (“ordered 2 new ideas”) and a note of what else he might be interested in seeing next time (the phrase “looking glass floral of Prices”, presumably referred to a design by Frank Price, one of the Studio's longest-standing employees). Figure 8 shows the work referred to as number 6013, a Jacobean-inspired design featuring a unicorn, with the words ‘pottery plate’ pencilled in the bottom right hand corner.²⁵

Importantly for our purposes here, the same entry records that Mr Milnes and Rex Silver visited the Victoria and Albert Museum together that afternoon, and identified an embroidered textile that they agreed could be the basis of a new textile design: “RS (Rex Silver) went to SKM, (the V&A), with Mr Milnes.”²⁶ Details of exactly which object they saw at the Museum were unfortunately not recorded. Their visit was followed up by a letter from Denby & Son a few days later, making clear some of the very detailed technical specifications that would be required and which presumably had been discussed in outline during their conversation:

“confirming Mr Milnes visit the other day, the Trellis embroidery design idea selected by Mr Silver and Mr Milnes in South Kensington Museum is to follow 2006 and to be of the same dimensions namely 16” high by 29 1/2” wide, and to have 8 colours including the blotch.”²⁷

A letter from the Silver Studio dated same day (possibly crossing in the post) refers to a design sent for comment, and makes clear the intention to produce a design that was attractive yet acceptable within the required technical parameters:

“... we are including sketches as follows;-

No6046A, a rough planning showing an adaptation of the design we saw at the Museum, whih (sic) is just large enough to treat in exactly the same touch as your old design No.2006. It would probably be difficult to work the design with the same breadth of touch if we make it smaller than this design suggests. The other trial attached to this, namely 6046B is a larger version of the idea but we think you will probably find this too large”²⁸

The reference to this being a ‘rough planning’ indicates Rex Silver’s expectation that more discussion would be required. Once agreed, the finished design for this textile would have been sent to Denby and Son so it does not now survive within the Silver Studio Collection, but there is a photograph in the album to confirm it as one of the Studio’s products. Occasionally, preliminary sketches or trial versions of designs do survive, though it has not been possible to locate one in this case. Rather unusually, a sample of the finished textile has survived: it was not always the case that the Studio obtained (or retained) samples of their own work (Figure 1).

But who is recorded as the designer of this textile? In the Studio’s time book, one of the Studio’s in-house designers, Herbert Crofts, is recorded as having undertaken two hours work on this design on December 17, 1928, presumably having been briefed by Rex immediately after his return from the Museum. Two other designers, Miss Butlin and Cyril, are recorded as having worked on the same design (number 6046) throughout January 1929, as it went through various iterations.²⁹ (Designers were paid a weekly wage, but the Studio kept records of the number of hours spent on each design in order to charge the client an appropriate fee).³⁰ This textile is therefore the work of three separate designers, based on a design idea derived from a combination of an existing textile belonging to the client and to something seen in the V&A Museum; an idea that was developed through discussion between Rex Silver and Mr Milnes and which required the approval of Robert Denby as head of the client firm. Clearly the notion of an individual, named designer is meaningless in this context.

The Silver Studio and the hidden mechanisms of design history

The Silver Studio provides an interesting opportunity to consider the meaning of design authorship and attribution within an industrial process. Clients of the Silver Studio had traditionally not credited its individual employees as the originators of designs, preferring instead to market textiles and wallpapers under their own brand names. By the 1920s and 30s it was becoming more common to attribute textiles to a named designer, and as Michael Saler notes, the traditional boundaries between ‘art’ and ‘industrial design’ were blurring.³¹ Artists such as Paul Nash, Graham Sutherland and Edward Bawden moved between painting and the design of posters, textiles and wallpapers with ease. The situation was a little

different at the middle and lower end of the market: at least one of the Silver Studio's clients, Franklin & Franklin, was prepared to contemplate adding the signatures of individual designers to designs for textiles. However, Rex Silver was resistant to the idea of attributing work to specific designers, and instead remained committed to what Protheroe has called a "contrived conservatism", whereby he took credit for designs as head of the Studio, despite the fact that the marketable value of 'signed work' was growing.³²

What are the advantages, then, of looking 'behind the scenes' at the work of a firm such as the Silver Studio? The first point is that the Silver Studio diary reminds us that the work of designers - in this company and elsewhere - is facilitated by the invisible work of others: those who raise invoices, order materials, pay employees, chat to clients and undertake a thousand other unglamorous tasks. As Till points out, "architecture depends," and not least on the work of these numerous supporting roles: similarly "design depends" and this work is intrinsic to, not separate from, the success of a business as a whole. Secondly the example of the Silver Studio demonstrates that to insist on the attribution of work to named designers naturally emphasizes the ground-breaking and innovative - or at least those who are able to position themselves as such - not least because they generally provide the historian with more evidence of their intentions. It does not leave room for discussion of those whose work relied on tradition and historicism rather than innovation. As a result, it privileges the material culture of the elite rather than the majority; the fashionable rather than the popular; the expensive and exclusive rather than the affordable and everyday. Looking more closely at the practices of a company producing for mass-market rather than elite tastes leads us to remember that design is always for someone, in this case, people who could not afford to purchase the social status that accompanied the work of a named designer.

Thirdly, and relatedly, to focus on the work of individual named designers is problematic in the light of the evidence available in this case, and in many others. To try to attribute names to work is tempting because it offers the opportunity to celebrate the agency of previously overlooked designers. This has frequently been expressed as a way to celebrate unknown women designers (though a similar approach could be applied to male designers such as Rex Silver or Herbert Crofts). Yet as Gorman argues, this approach perpetuates the idea of design as a singular activity, rather than recognizing it as a complex process characterized by a division of labour.³³ Rex Silver and his colleagues are amongst those who have generally remained on the periphery of conventional discussions about design history, since their work precludes design attribution in the conventional sense. To point towards the impossibility of a single attribution is not to deny their agency entirely. The personalities, training and skills of the people involved in the creation of the textile discussed here remain relevant to its final appearance: Rex Silver, Herbert Crofts, Miss Butlin, Cyril, Mr Milnes, Robert Denby (and others unnamed) all had a part to play. Instead, as JM Richards proposed, the emphasis should be on collective processes of design. This textile, and other examples of the Silver Studio's output, can be understood as the product of a complex network of personal and professional relationships, collaborations, negotiations and mediating practices. Rather than being the work of one individual, this textile is

an example of the output of a modern industrial system which responded directly to the concerns of the market, and in which design practice operated within the wider context of consumers, manufacturers and retailers.

APPENDIX 1: Silver Studio Clients, 1928

The diary for 1928 suggests that the Silver Studio had to keep track of nearly a hundred individuals who were employees, agents or representatives of the following firms. Many of these visited the Silver Studio during 1928. The Studio conducted correspondence with a further handful of firms on a speculative basis, or where the contact did not result in a visit and/or a sale. Further archival work would be required to establish exactly how many designs were purchased by each company: the purpose here is merely to indicate the range of clients with whom the Silver Studio worked in a given year.

Allan, Cockshut & Co, London; wallpapers
Bayspoole & Co (agent for Liberty)
Bernasconi Ltd, London; silk ties
Burgess, Ledward & Co Ltd, London; dress prints
Calico Printers' Association, Manchester; printed textiles
Robert Denby & Son, Bradford; furnishing textiles
Firth & Sons, London/ Heckmondwike; carpets, rugs, velvets, moquettes
William Foxton Ltd, London; printed textiles
Franklin & Franklin, London; furnishing textiles
Laurence & Co (Pacific Mills), New York; textiles
HH Lea & Son (London agent for Leborgne);
Fand Leborgne, France; textiles
John Lyle & Co, Glasgow; carpets
Liberty & Co, London; dress prints
Marshall Field & Co; dress prints
Thos Boyd & Co, Manchester; printed textiles
Titus Blatter, New York; textiles
Tulliallan Fabric Co, Kincardine, Scotland; chenille
Turnbull & Stockdale, Lancashire; printed textiles
Ramm, Son & Crocker Ltd; printed textiles
Sidney Smith, Nottingham; silk embroidered bedspreads
Sixten & Cassey, London; textiles
Simpson & Godlee, Manchester; printed textiles
Stonards Ltd, London; printed furnishing textiles
Tomkinsons, Kidderminster; carpets
Vanoutryve et Cie, France: woven textiles and velvets
Warner & Sons, Essex; woven textiles

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- ¹ Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of the Modern Movement: From William Morris to Walter Gropius* (London: Faber, 1936).
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- ¹⁷ Protheroe, “Bloom and Blotch,” 26–27.
- ¹⁸ Correspondence from Miss Mold to Rex Silver, November 1928
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- ²⁰ Ibid

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- ²¹ Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (University of California Press, 2003).
- ²² Silver Studio Diary, May 23, 1928
- ²³ Silver Studio Diary, February 22, 1928
- ²⁴ Silver Studio Diary, 1928.
- ²⁵ This is recorded as having been designed by Lewis Jones in 1928 (Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture. SD13726). Presumably the words ‘pottery plate’ indicated the source of inspiration rather than the intended use.
- ²⁶ Ibid. The South Kensington Museum (“SKM”) had been renamed the Victoria and Albert Museum (“the V&A”) in 1899, but clearly by 1928 the abbreviated version of the old name was still in colloquial use.
- ²⁷ Correspondence from the Silver Studio to Denby & Son, December 19, 1928. Design number 2006 to which both letters refer must be a sample of a textile belonging to Denby & Son, as it does not relate to the Silver Studio’s records.
- ²⁸ Correspondence from Denby & Son to the Silver Studio, December 19, 1928
- ²⁹ Nothing more is known about either of these designers; even Cyril’s surname is not noted in the Silver Studio’s records.
- ³⁰ Silver Studio Time Book, 1928
- ³¹ Michael Saler, *The Avant-Garde in Interwar England: Medieval Modernism and the London Underground* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
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